

American Indians and Pioneers

Before and After

James Fenimore Cooper

by

Dr. Thomas A. Clark

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James Fenimore Cooper published the first of his Leatherstocking Tales in 1823. By this date Americans were riding a wave of nationalism, and no doubt they were developing a warm sense of romanticism about their immediate past. Cooper's Prairie (1827) was both a nostalgic view of the past, and a clumsy glimpse of the future American West. The last great blocks of American wilderness and virgin lands were being penetrated. Already omnivorous American frontiersmen and traders had opened the Santa Fe Trail to wagon trade, were turning the Missouri into a channel of primitive commerce, and had crossed the Rockies to the Pacific Coast. Stories of the great fur hunting expeditions were current, as well as those of contacts and conflicts with western Indians, and of the rise of a new breed of long hunters. The western rendezvous was already established both as an annual festival of trade, and as a moment of high debauchery and dissipation.¹

Four years after Prairie was published concurrently in Paris and Philadelphia, the Reverend Timothy Flint had produced in book form a series of letters and observations made in the West under the title Recollections of the Last Ten Years. John Bradbury, a Scotch botanist and observer of the western scene, had published his Travels into the Interior of

America, 1809-1811, in which he described the adventures of a fur trading expedition on its way to the northwest Pacific Coast under the guidance of Wilson Price Hunt. Henry Marie Brackenridge at the same time accompanied the trading party of Manuel Lisa up the Missouri. Relations between these parties were strained, but Bradbury and Brackenridge were agents of good will between the fiercely competitive leaders.²

Both of these travel accounts were read rather widely in the United States, and no doubt James Fenimore Cooper had access to them. Bradbury described graphically his interview with the aging Daniel Boone. Hunt spotted the old man standing near the river at Charette, Missouri, and who told Bradbury who he was. The Scotsman jumped ashore and spent considerable time talking to the old borderer. Daniel mistakenly informed Bradbury that he was then eighty-four years of age. In a brief paragraph the traveler recorded one of the keenest appreciations of the sense of destiny which the hunter had for the great land before him. Both Bradbury and Brackenridge wrote full and vivid descriptions of the wild country through which their parties traveled.

Daniel Boone became a fixed personality on at least three frontiers. John Filson gave him a permanent place in frontier imagery in his Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucky (1784). This book contained what the author called an autobiography which established Boone, the long hunter, as a chief among western wanderers, and called his exploits to the attention of Lord Byron who spread his fame abroad in two cantos of Don Juan. At the time of his death Daniel Boone had become the best known of American frontiersmen. He had remained a restless hunter who constantly sought to move into new and unexploited territory.³ Timothy Flint further glorified him with the title, "the first white man of the

West."⁴

Daniel Boone hunted on westward from his home in Missouri, but he was denied the opportunity to go on to the Rockies with the new breed of mountain men. These rugged pioneers were no more than later versions of long hunters who dealt with Indians, the elements, animals, and broad stretches of geography in much the same way frontiersmen had met similar challenges back in old Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the Carolinas. Daniel Boone, Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, and the Sublette brothers shared many experiences in common. All of them knew both the virtues and the treacheries of the Indians. They sensed the freedom born of lonely wandering in the great western wilderness. They also experienced a common yearning to help bring about the conquest of their backwoods paradises by white settlers.⁵

Behind the long hunters, American-settler--civilization expanded with great rapidity. All of the old Northwest, except Michigan and Wisconsin, had been formed into states. The old eastern Indian tribes were either destroyed or were on the verge of removal to the arid plains beyond the Mississippi. Pontiac, Blackfish, Cornstalk, John Logan, Tecumseh, and the Prophet were gone from the wilderness. Boone's old rivals, the Shawnees and Wyandottes had met disaster in the War of 1812. The dramatic shooting of Tecumseh in the Battle of the Thames symbolically ended a chapter of stirring Indian occupancy of the Ohio Valley, and of much of the southern tier of country east of the tip of Lake Michigan.⁶

Removal of the Indian menace from Ohio, Indiana, and the southern Michigan territory brought relief to the settlers, but no part of a solution to the Indian problem for the Nation. No longer were settlers along the old frontier subjected to surprise attacks, cruel murders, heartless tortures and burn-

ings at the stake, running gantlets; no longer was there kidnaping of young children who were taken away to the villages to be turned into creatures of nature, forgetting quickly their former social and family ties.

The Indian himself was overwhelmed by the on-rush of white settlements; nevertheless he left his imprint deeply upon the land. There were countless stories of his uprootings, of his resistance to white encroachments, of his skills and lore, and of his culture. A stern realization of the threats of destruction which they faced came early to the tribes. A Chipewa before Detroit summed up the feelings of large numbers of his race. To British officers he said, "Although you have conquered the French you have not conquered us! We are not your slaves. These lakes, these woods, the mountains were left to us by our ancestors. They are our inheritance; and we will part with them to none."⁷ In 1758, Chief Ketishund at Logstown on the Ohio tried to persuade white settlers, through Frederick Post, to withdraw from the lands west of the mountains. He expressed the common fear of Indians wherever the pressures of white settlements became noticeable.⁸

The Indian had his tales of murders, cruelties, and acts of faithlessness committed against him by white men. None was more gripping than the lament of the Mingo Chief John Logan. In 1774, Logan's family was butchered at Baker's Bottom on Yellow Creek in present day West Virginia. Later when representatives of the Shawnees and Wyandottes were assembled at Pickawillany Plains in 1774 to make the Treaty of Charlotte with Lord Dunmore, John Logan charged Daniel Greathouse and Michael Cresap with murdering his people. This incident had the unfortunate effect of stirring border hysteria which resulted in Dunmore's war and loss of both white and Indian lives.

Logan was eloquent in his castigation of the cowardly borderers who had willfully engaged in murder. His oration was so impressive that some of his hearers claimed to remember it and to have been able to recite it verbatim in the future. In time it was to become a popular schoolboy oration. Here was a noble Indian chieftain protesting in the most polished eloquence a repulsive crime which weighed heavily on the conscience of every white man present.⁹

A year later an angry young Cherokee chieftain, Dragging Canoe, warned Richard Henderson that the great bargain which he had snatched from the Cherokee elders in the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals was a fine one, but the country gained would become a dark and bloody ground. Addressing to his people a plea not to accept the terms of the treaty he said, "The real people, once so great and formidable, will be compelled to seek refuge in some distant wilderness. There they will be permitted to stay only a short while, until they again behold the advancing banners of the great host."¹⁰

Later the Shawnee Tecumseh tried to form a confederation to stay the advance of white civilization with its long hunters, land speculators, cabin settlers, and despoilers of woods and game. He was to be remembered as a noble man, even by those ragged and half-frozen backwoodsmen who still smarted from the bitter sting of defeat and butchery at Frenchtown on the River Raisin. He was considered a man of superior intelligence who died a hero's death in the defense of his people and their homeland.¹¹

Two decades later the Sac chief Black Hawk and a band of followers became embroiled with squatters in Illinois and Wisconsin. The Black Hawk war of 1832 became a highly publicized conflict which involved a complexity of human emotions. There were homesick Indians trying to return to their homeland

and an old way of life, the faithlessness of an Indian treaty, the pressure of squatters, the influence of state and local politics, and a rowdy border campaign by the United States Army. The central figure of this frontier incident was Chief Black Hawk who was pictured as being at once devil and nostalgic leader of a sorely betridden people. The capture of Black Hawk and his people was a triumph for the army's pride, if not a great victory for its arms. Never did a Shawnee band rush back across the Ohio with a victim for the village fire and stake with greater sense of victory than federal officials paraded the captors of the Rock River Campaign. Black Hawk and his companions were taken to Washington from Jefferson Barracks. Making the journey by steamboat and stage coach the Indians became objectives of great curiosity along the way; crowds gathered to see them pass by. In Washington Black Hawk was presented to President Andrew Jackson in a dramatic meeting. The Sac Chieftain greeted the great white father with a statement which the old Tennessean must have wished he had made himself. "I am a man, and you are another," said the natural child of the Wisconsin border. Later at Fortress Monroe, Colonel Abram Eustis was to treat the Sac prisoners more as brothers than as savage captives. When the Indians were ordered released to return home, Black Hawk delivered an eloquent farewell speech which added to the growing volume of Indian oratory.¹²

By the time of his release from custody at Fortress Monroe, Black Hawk had achieved the stature of nobility. On his return journey to the West his custodians saw to it that he would be on display in several places in the East. At Baltimore he again met President Jackson who sent the old chief on his way with a paternal lecture ringing in his ears. In Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Buffalo, and Detroit

crowds greeted the Sacs with both curiosity and cheers. The English traveler Shiriff saw the Indians when they arrived in New York City, and observed that they created more excitement than did President Jackson on his visit the day before. Black Hawk, said Shiriff, was kissed by some of the women who thronged about him. In Niblo's Garden he was a greater sensation than either an elephant or a mammoth.¹³

This was the kind of an Indian situation which excited James Fenimore Cooper. It had in it the drama of a savage being paraded before sophisticated whites, of a simple man of nature having been wronged in his innate human desire to return home, of a noble warrior fighting against great odds, and of a representative of a vanishing race. Black Hawk represented another of the many vanishing Mohicans in American history. Unhappily Cooper was not in the United States during the Sac tour, but he knew of it. Cooper had seen many Indian delegations on their way to Washington, and he had met others in that day. Nothing more clearly reflected the shifting American sentiments toward the Indians than did the reception of Black Hawk. One day he was a savage and a threatening fiend, and the next he was a noble red man.

No doubt Pocahontas was the first of the noble savages. She was heroine and benefactor for the earliest English settlers in North America. Set against the Pocahontas tradition of kindness and cooperation was the one of an evil and resistant Powhatan who perhaps had a vision of the future of his people in the face of the invading white hoard from the sea. John Smith was the first of the English authors to glorify the good Indians, and to vilify the bad ones. In the future, traits of Indian character were to be balanced between good and evil:¹⁴ the good deeds of Squanto were contrasted with the threatening ones of Massasoit; Half King was compared with the unfriendly

leaders about the upper Ohio, John Logan with Chief Cornstalk, and Atta Culla Culla with Dragging Canoe.

In 1796 and 1797 Thomas Jefferson undertook a rather careful investigation of the bloody incident at Baker's Bottom. He was not, however, provoked to seek the truth because of the inhuman atrocities committed on the Logan family, but rather in a defense of American environment. He was provoked by the defamation of American resources by Monsieur Buffon and the Abbe Raynal. These ignorant Frenchmen had pretended to believe that both American animals and natives were degenerate because of deficiencies of soil and climate. Jefferson had seen the bones of the arctic elephant found at the Big Bone Lick on the south bank of the Ohio in Kentucky, and had a fairly reliable notion of the physical sturdiness of the American Indian. Certainly as a farmer he knew firsthand about the quality of domestic animals. As a part of his evidence he cited to refute the arrogant French authors, he referred to the eloquent speech of John Logan. He recited the details of the event which had provoked it. In opening this old wound to white conscience, Jefferson could not foresee that mention of the Logan atrocity in the first edition of his Notes on Virginia would stir up a hot political debate. Mention of the Logan speech and the horrible incident which had caused it brought a protest from Luther Martin of Maryland, a son-in-law of Michael Cresap. Because of the inhumanity involved, the fame of the author of the Notes, the nationalistic argument with the French scientists, and the highly partisan political situation in the nation at that moment, John Logan's fame was spread at home and abroad.¹⁵

Logan's melancholic recitation became, in many respects, the voice of a guilty frontier conscience. Frontiersmen themselves might have dismissed the incident on Yellow Creek as only a bit of

justified violence in frontier warfare, and as a crime that resulted naturally from the making of initial settlements along the border. They could not, however, dismiss so lightly a bereaved Indian charging them so pointedly, in the English tongue, with the grossest of barbarities. A mere recitation of the atrocities named in the oration refuted the white man's contention that he brought to the frontier, civilization and christianity.

Pioneers of the Scioto Valley met at Westfall in Pickaway County, Ohio, on July 28, 1841, and on the spot where John Logan was said to have delivered his speech. They organized the Logan Historical Society and set out to establish the genuineness of the speech. They defended Logan against charges that he had died a drunkard's death, and proposed to erect a monument on which they would engrave his oration.¹⁶

The American Pioneer, the society's publication, glorified the act of pioneering and contained accounts of hair-raising adventures between settlers and Indians. Stories which were tinged with romantic nostalgia described the exploits and hardships of both races. Whether or not James Fenimore Cooper read this periodical, he certainly knew the Logan story. By 1841 Cooper was back in the United States writing the Pathfinder and the Deerslayer, and battling with newspaper reviewers and editors over the critical comments they made about his works.¹⁷

Cooper was sensitive to the impulses of the westward movement. By the very course of action taken by the characters in his novels, he portrayed the advance of the frontier as a virile, all-sweeping force. He viewed this advance both in its international and domestic aspects, and nowhere did he give way to the belief that the pulsating tide of spreading settlement could be stayed, or that appreciable islands of virgin country and Indian civilization east of the Mis-

Mississippi could be preserved. He knew firsthand of the greed of land grabbers, the tenacity of squatters, and of the force of local and national politics in this area. Some of his characters discussed in the most elementary terms the impact of the advancing line of white civilization. Friction between the United States and Britain over border troubles caused him to voice an opinion through a character; so did the public land question, and the fate of Indians in an expanding American society.¹⁸

A biographer claimed for Cooper that he read everything available on the subjects of Indians and pioneers. If he read the official statements of the Presidents of the United States between 1817 and 1840, he gained the fixed notion that the Indian tribes east of the Mississippi were being weakened and dispersed. By 1817, and the era of post War of 1812 inflation, a rising tide of population was manifesting enormous pressure upon the Indian frontier.

James Monroe, in his first annual message to Congress, said that a series of Indian treaties pertaining to land along Lake Erie had been made on conditions, "very favorable to the United States, and, as it is presumed, not less so to the tribes themselves."¹⁹ Here he referred to impending removal of Indians from all of Ohio and parts of the Indiana and Michigan territories. The tragedy of the Battle of the Thames and Tippecanoe was now being compounded. To the south, treaties had either been made or were in process of conclusion which would ultimately remove Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws from the land. President Monroe predicted that the time was near at hand when lands drained into the Mobile Bay and by the Lower Mississippi would be freed of Indian occupation. Then he tried to soften the official sense of guilt of crowding the Indians off their ancestral lands by saying that the

national policy was reflected, "In this progress, which the rights of nature demand and nothing can prevent, marking a growth rapid and gigantic, it is our duty to make new efforts for the preservation, improvement, and civilization of the native inhabitants. The hunter state can exist only in the vast uncultivated desert. It yields to the more dense and compact form and greater force of civilized population; and of the right it ought to yield, for the earth was given to mankind to support the greatest number which it is capable, and no tribe or people have a right to withhold from the wants of others more than it is necessary for their own support and comfort."²⁰

This was one of the first apologies made by the United States Government for the removal of the Indians from lands where they had lived for unknown generations in the past. Even so it was hardly consistent with the fact. Many a Virginian would have been deprived of his land claim if the principle of "no more than is necessary, for their own support and comfort" had been applied to their land-grabbing. Of more significance, this policy hastened the end of all the Mohicans whether they were Wyandottes, Shawnees, Sac, or Fox. The end, however, was not to be without a lingering enmity. In a subsequent message President Monroe explored further the problems of the natural brothers of the land. Heretofore, the official policy had been all wrong. The United States had unfortunately dealt with the tribes as independent nations without their having justifiable pretensions to that rank. This had, he believed, flattered their pride, retarded their improvement, and prepared them in many instances for their destruction. The western white population was growing, and the Indians were being driven back, yet they had a claim against the government because of their noble nature. "We should become their real benefactor," said the President,

"we should perform the office of their Great Father, the endearing title which they emphatically give the Chief Magistrate of our Union. Their sovereignty over vast territories should cease, in lieu of which the right of soil should be secured to each individual and his posterity in competent portions."²¹ The Indian should be educated, and converted into a good husbandryman, but most of all he should accept a solid white yeoman concept of domestic economy and social stability.

In his eighth annual message, President Monroe again viewed the noble red man and his plight. The white population was still growing. Congress was urged to devise some plan by which the Indian could be removed from the immediate path of westward expansion onto less desirable lands in the West. This time he spoke of the great desert viewed by the expeditions of Lewis and Clark, Pike, and Stephen H. Long. The Indians should not be torn suddenly away from their old cultural backgrounds. "To remove them from it by force, even with a view to their own security and happiness, would be revolting to humanity and utterly unjustifiable. Between the limits of our present states and Territories and the Rocky Mountains and Mexico, there is a vast territory to which they might be invited with inducements which might be successful."²²

Four years later John Quincy Adams rationalized the Indian problem in his own way. He believed the ultimate design of the government was to incorporate the Indians into a civilized institutional pattern as rapidly as they could be absorbed. Formerly they had been considered children to be moved about at will. They were hunters who could be transferred from one area to another without doing violence to their mode of life. As matters stood in 1828 Americans had been far more successful in snatching away

Indian lands than in "inspiring them with the spirit of civilization. But in appropriating to ourselves their hunting grounds we have brought upon ourselves the obligation of providing them the arts of civilization and the doctrines of Christianity, we have unexpectedly found them forming in the midst of ourselves communities claiming to be independent of ours and rivals of sovereignty within the territories of the members of our union."²³

This is a partial background to Indian removal to the territories beyond the Mississippi, an issue which was to stir rigorous debate both in Congress and before the public. The Cherokees had established a civilization of high order in Georgia. They had developed an alphabet, built churches, enacted laws, and conducted schools. As President Adams said, they had adopted a constitution and were attempting to establish a sovereign state.

In the election campaign of 1828, Indian removal was an issue. Andrew Jackson was outspoken in favoring the proposal, and in 1830 Congress enacted legislation which looked forward to removal, if it did not actually provide for enforced removal. There began a period of confusion and aroused emotions in which the United States Government embarked upon one of the most tedious social undertakings without proper guidance or experience, and apparently without a proper sense of the intensive human anxieties involved. Subsequently the "Trail of Tears" from Georgia and Tennessee to the western Indian Territory was to prove a highly disturbing experience.²⁴

Not only were Indians removed from their native lands; some of them had actually ceased to exist. In 1831 Alex De Tocqueville lamented the plight of the Indians he saw in his travels. Already the Narragansetts, Mohicans, Pequots, Lenapes, and Delawares had disappeared. He claimed that he talked with the

last of the Iroquois who was reduced to begging alms.²⁵ At Memphis he saw Choctaws being passed over the Mississippi--a sad and cheerless sight. Women, children, the ill, the aged, and the wounded were carried across the ice strewn river. "No cry, no sob was heard amongst the assembled crowd: all were silent. Their calamities were of ancient date, and they knew them to be irremediable. Behind them they left their dogs who sent up a dismal howl, and plunging all together into icy waters of the Mississippi they swam after the boat."²⁶

James Fenimore Cooper informed his readers that he believed the Great Prairie, or the Great Desert, appeared to be "the final gathering place for the Indians. The remnants of the Mohicans and the Delawares, of the Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokees, are destined to fulfill their time on these vast plains."

²⁷ Not only would the plains gather the Indians into their measureless stretches of waste, they would collect in their turn venturesome white pioneers. Already Ohio and Kentucky and the older states were feeding the westward flow of emigration. Settlers of different geographical and national origin were caught in the vortex of the westward movement, and were being ground into a fine equalitarian grist. The fertile lands, wooded and well-watered, east of the Mississippi were disgorging their overflow of settlers beyond the great river to take up lands in Missouri, to work the lead veins of the upper valley, to seek furs and skins in the Rockies, and to pilot wagon trains hundreds of miles across the Arkansas, Cimarron, and Canadian to Santa Fe. William Becknell was as much a frontiersman as were Simon Kenton and Lewis Wetzel.

Before Becknell, there had gone Lewis and Clark, John Colter, Zebulon M. Pike, and scores of others. There were men, "ordinarily governed by

their habits or deluded by their wishes. A few, led by the phantoms of hope, and ambitions of sudden affluence, sought the mines of the virgin territory; but by far the greater portion of the emigrants were satisfied to establish themselves along the margins of the larger water courses, content with the rich returns that the generous, alluvial bottoms never failed to bestow on the most desultory industry."²⁸ This was the manner in which many of the wide stretches of the wild continent were settled.

The emigrant rolled on with his, "vehicles loaded with household goods and implements of husbandry, the few straggling sheep and cattle were herded in the rear, and the rugged appearance and careless mien of the sturdy men who loitered at the sides of the lingering teams, united to announce a band of emigrants seeking for the eldorado of the West."²⁹

These emigrants were headed into the great silent wilderness of prairie, grass, and desolation which jarred both James Fenimore Cooper and Stephen H. Long. Cooper had known firsthand the great forest lands of the East. In The Last of the Mohicans, his characters moved along tunnels cut through the tall timber by streams, and pierced by faint trails. Man had little or no perspective. His eyes, by force of circumstance, were confined to ground level, and even then his range of vision was severely limited. The great prairie was like the sea only in the extent of human visibility. There were few, if any, monuments, no signs of change, nor of promise. In its very aridity was the constant threat of human disaster. Man wandered across its face in seeming aimlessness as though he stumbled through the scope of time itself. His view, in Cooper's vicarious concept, was unbroken, his goal undefined, and his fate suspended in constant frustration. In writing of wooded

country, Cooper's sense of change became more pronounced. His readers had seen the woods disappear as though they were waves of fog vanishing from the land. The wilderness was at once awesome and challenging. Hawkeye in The Last of the Mohicans summarized Cooper's attitude toward the forest: "That's a trail that nothing but a nose can follow; grass is a treacherous carpet for a flying party to tread on, but wood and stone take no print from a moccasin. Had you worn your armed boots, there might, indeed, have been something to fear; but with the deer skin suitably prepared, a man may trust himself, generally on rocks with safety."³⁰

Critics over the years have made various appraisals of James Fenimore Cooper's frontier tales. His books might be dismissed as the products of an early age of American romanticism, or as being pioneer efforts at using native characters, settings, and lore. He wrote hurriedly and in a haphazard manner. Much of his material is supercilious. Characters, as wooden as the trees of his forests, were dragged into play. Cooper's reading, no doubt extensive, seems, like his writing, to have been done hurriedly. His plotting was more often than not clumsy, and many of his characters were too naive to be left alone in the woods. His women were as stiff and out of place in western settings as European ladies in waiting would have been in a Shawnee chief's wigwam. One can hardly imagine Rebecca and Jemima Boone, the Calloway girls, or Bonnie Kate Sherill tripping along an imaginary forest trail in The Last of the Mohicans.

By the time the final Leatherstocking Tales were being written, American newspapers, specialized periodicals, and books publicized not only the act of pioneering with all its hardships and challenges, but also described the humorous character among the pioneers. Already the various American folk charac-

ters were being cast in comic relief. Among these were the greenhorn backwoods bumpkins, the blundering German immigrant, the shrewd Yankee peddler, the ignorant Irishman, the circuit rider, and the half-horse-half-alligator denizen of river and trail. Americans everywhere were amused by the backwoods dialect stories, twangy frontier sermons, yarns about the comical escapades of greenhorns, mock heroics in Indian fights or skull and knuckle fist fights among white men, and eloquent flights of spread-eagle oratory.

In a more serious vein, authors were already writing local histories in which pioneering was a central theme. Numerous accounts of Indian skirmishes and wars were published in pamphlets and books. One of these, Alexander Scott Wither's Chronicles of Border Warfare, detailed all the major frontier Indian fights down to the first decade of the nineteenth century. Biographies described the exploits of all the great border scouts and Indian fighters. Accounts of Lewis Wetzel, Simon Kenton, Simon Girty, Joe Logsdon, Daniel Boone, and scores of others were already in print. There were accounts of woodsmen who made phenomenal jumps, like that of McCollough near Wheeling, West Virginia, to escape Indians. Lewis Wetzel's great footrace was widely publicized, and so were stories of men diving under water and breathing through reeds, or hiding under overhanging stream banks. Old trailbreakers told innumerable yarns of their ability to follow Indians by observing upturned leaves, disarranged branches, or bruised clumps of soil. In turn they told how Indians had followed them --or how Indians had imparted useful lore which helped make white men into more skilled woodsmen.³¹ As Hawkeye said, "Danger! no, not absolutely of danger; for, with vigilant ears and quick eyes, we can manage to keep a few hours ahead of the knaves; or, if we

must try the rifle, there are three of us who understand its gifts as well as any you can name on the borders. No, not danger; but that we shall have what you may call a brisk push of it is probable; and it may happen, a brush, a skirmish, or some such diversion, but always where covers are good, and ammunition abundant."³² What Cooper meant was that every woodsman had an eye good enough to spot danger before it faced him suddenly, that he was a good enough rifleman to stand his ground, and that when the going became rough, it was every man to his tree, and the devil take the hindermost.

When Cooper's last tales were being published, Americans all along the old borders were feeling triumphant. They may have been romantic about their accomplishments, and even boastful of their heroes. There was evidence to indicate that they were becoming more nationalistically inclined. Hundreds of travel accounts, critical, naive, or understanding, stirred the American backwoodsmen almost as much as they did Cooper himself. Editorials, personal memoirs, and political speeches document the fact that Americans everywhere were keenly sensitive to criticisms by foreigners. At the same time the gradual subjection of the once proud Indian and his removal to lands west of the Mississippi represented simultaneously a great victory for civilized white society, and one of its most shameful acts. The white man could partially atone for his greed in snatching the Indians' lands and of removing him from the burial mounds of his ancestors by proclaiming his keen knowledge of the wilderness ways, and by emphasizing his traits of character in Chingatchgook style. He was given a status of nobility in folklore and heroic story. By the 1840's when the last of the Leatherstocking Tales were being published, Indian occupation of lands east of the Mississippi had all but ended.

This was the major book-buying region of the United States, and here the New York author's works found nostalgic and reminiscent readers. Cooper gave the themes of Indian lore and vanishment international fame. For Americans, however, he did not call attention to the Indian as a major figure about which to create a national history and literature so much as he gave a fictional dimension to the subject which so many less experienced authors were trying to describe in the pedestrian memoirs, autobiographies, and local histories.

The stream of publications in the field of pioneering and Indian lore and history has run flush since 1800. Jefferson gave major impetus to the writing in both areas in his Notes on Virginia. He dignified the position of the Indian as a man. An enormous volume of travel accounts and pictorial records dealt with many aspects of the subject. Since the publication of James Fenimore Cooper's numerous tales, scores of novelists have written both scintillating and ridiculous stories about pioneers and Indians. None, however, more nearly approached the old master's touch than those sweating scribes who ground out a flood of florid dime novels. They were more restricted in space than Cooper in telling their yarns, developing their moldy plots, and clarifying the situations of their characters, they were more restricted in space than Cooper; so they created fleeting characters who often performed only once in the pages of the cheap little novels and then vanished like warriors under the cover of night. Like menacing braves they hit their readers and ran. If, in their haste, the novelists wrote themselves into sticky corners, they applied some mysterious Indian crafts and lore in good Cooper style to free themselves. The dime novelists could not linger to carry on prolix conversations on philosophical points of Indian survival, religion, national

boundary policies, personal integrity, and land grabbing.

Heroes, red and white, were often as inept as those who stumbled through the pages of Cooper's novels. Their Pathfinders, Deerslayers, Hawkeyes, and Natty Bumppos seldom had the sterling characters of the originals. When they wrote of human integrity it had the appearance of being a synthetic trait which could be put on or shed like a fringed hunting shirt. Their braves were never so wise or sturdy as Chingachgook; nevertheless, the Indian as a heroic and romantic figure was assured a place in sentimental and reminiscent literature.

The pioneer, in and out of Cooper's novels, became a sacrosanct figure who tramped across a continent making settlements, begetting children, organizing states, and setting the course of American frontier history without revealing much of his intensely human character. He gave little sense of the realities of grubbing for food and shelter, fighting neighbors in and out of court over conflicting land claims, or of becoming a sweaty, labor-stained yeoman. Nevertheless the Cooper concept of the American frontiersman and Indian has survived even on the pages of Pulitzer winning novels, cheap paperback westerns, abroad in the yarns of Karl Maye, in Saturday afternoon movies, and on nightly television shows. Modern Americans go on trying to balance off Pocahontas against Powhatan, John Logan against Chief Cornstalk, and Chingachgook against all the bad Indians in American history. The unerring craft of plain-speaking, uncomplicated Natty Bumppo and his blameless character was a personification of most concepts which Americans have applied to their pioneer ancestors. It is one which each succeeding generation has enlarged upon, until the frontiersman now appears in much American history and literature as God's chosen

apostle of civilization who set forth to inherit the American Continent in spite of the Indian barrier which confronted him. At the same time he used the red man's craft to the fullest to achieve his objectives.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.A. Vandiver, The Fur Trade and Early Western Exploration, (Cleveland, 1929), pp. 169-190.
2. Timothy Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, (Boston, 1826). John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1809, 1810, 1811, (Liverpool, 1817), p. 16. H.M. Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana; Containing Geographical, Statistical and Historical Notices of that Vast and Important Portion of America, (Pittsburgh, 1814).
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